



Accra Annual Meeting - Day 4

Regional workshop on agriculture and food systems for nutrition - West Africa, 16-19 November 2015, Accra

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Professor Sandy Thomas, Director of the Global Panel opened the workshop which aimed to provide a clear articulation of the factors shaping future challenges and opportunities to strengthen diets and nutrition in the region, and to help to identify key actions for decision makers working in partnership. **Professor Baffour Agyeman-Duah**, CEO of the JAK Foundation then gave a formal welcome to the participants.

Keynote presentation

The Honorable Gabriel Esselfie, Chairman of the Ghana Parliamentary Select Committee on Agriculture, Food and Cocoa Affairs highlighted the key challenges of the agricultural sector. Crops are mainly rain-fed and subject to weather failure or excesses, farm sizes are very small impeding mechanisation, management and coordination of the sector, and most farmers are middle aged or older. He welcomed the JAK Foundation and the Global Panel's emphasis on the importance of seeking lasting solutions and set out the [Ghana Parliamentary Select Committee's](#) overarching oversight responsibilities. He noted that the Ghanaian Parliament has formed the Ghana 'Parliamentarians Against Hunger and Malnutrition' group, and reiterated the Committee's commitment to support the two ministries - the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Ministry of Fisheries.

Roundtable Conclusions

Global Panel member, **Emmy Simmons** and Global Panel Representative for **Dr Akin Adesina**, **Dr Victor Ajieroh** provided a review of the key points and priorities established by [the Global Panel's Accra High-Level Roundtable](#) to steer the discussion of the workshop.

Emmy Simmons made the following points:

- There are multiple exogenous drivers which affect how agriculture and food systems can influence nutrition in West Africa, for example rising urbanisation, rapid population growth, climate change and technological change.
- A 'business as usual' approach to policy will incur significant nutritional costs, whereas there are multiple benefits in taking action now to reduce malnutrition (including overweight, obesity and stunting), and to reduce the prevalence of anaemia in women and children, cognitive under-achievement, and NCDs (including type II diabetes).
- There are opportunities across West Africa for timely policy action to align with the momentum of the SDGs, and the implementation of the Malabo Declaration. Improved nutrition contributes to the development of opportunities for economic growth and equity and better health and wellbeing. Ghana, and Africa as a whole, must act to prevent *“stunted children today meaning stunted economies tomorrow.”*
- There was very considerable scope for technological and policy innovation to improve nutrition.
- A high quality evidence base on food systems is required to support policy and action. This needs to include market dynamics linking agriculture to consumers. The evidence from school feeding programmes for children on linkages to positive outcomes in agriculture, health, and local economies showed how better nutrition enabled girls to stay in school, delayed marriage and prevented early pregnancies.

Dr Victor Ajieroh underscored the need for more technological innovation and the abandonment of 'business as usual' approaches to nutrition in West Africa. He made the following points, drawing on the previous day discussion and his experience in Nigeria:

- Continuous and stable high level leadership and commitment were essential to elevate nutrition to the highest priority. National leadership and local ownership, as exemplified in the Brazilian approach were critical.
- Multi-sectoral engagement was essential - nutrition involved different sectors and government departments, (for example health, social protection, agriculture and finance) and also the private sector which has an important role in developing technological solutions including biofortification, and better food distribution and marketing. Studies, such as the [Costs of Hunger In Africa](#) study also provided useful evidence for leveraging multi-sectoral investment.
- Data and capacity building were critical to advancing activities leading to better nutrition outcomes. Data quality, and the implementation of common standards, improved access (including to existing data sets), needed to be

addressed. An effective nutritional database, perhaps similar to those in the USA, was a much needed innovation.

- Regulation and financial incentives to motivate and impose standards on the private sector were key.
- Communication and consumer education on nutrition delivered through extensive, sustained multi-sectoral platforms were needed. *“The secret of Brazil’s success in nutrition was communication, communication, communication!”* School feeding programmes could provide practical educational platforms to help develop new nutrition-sensitive generations.
- A national road map which defined routes to effective policy-making for better nutrition would help take forward the issues raised in West African context.

The Global Panel’s Perspectives

A presentation was made by **Professor Jeff Waage**, Technical Advisor to the Global Panel.

The Global Panel was established in 2013 to:

- Stimulate a stronger evidence-base on how changes in agriculture and food systems can improve nutrition;
- Create and promote a new understanding of the role and future potential of agriculture and food systems in improving nutrition;
- Catalyse collaboration in agricultural and food systems that will improve diets and nutrition outcomes for all.

The Global Panel’s primary aim is to provide evidence-based guidance to decision makers and to encourage partnerships to take action to cut malnutrition in low and middle income countries. It emphasises the importance of understanding the local food environment especially with regard to food diversity, adequacy and safety.

The discussion session which followed raised several points which are summarised below:

- There is a need for more data and capacity building to develop and support multi-sectoral approaches for nutrition, and better co-ordination of investment and financing.
- Improved metrics are required to measure progress in initiatives undertaken under the auspices of CAADP and the Malabo Declaration.
- Strong institutions and the de-coupling of politics from development programmes on nutrition were fundamental to making progress. Policies on rights to food could be embedded in national constitutions, as in Brazil, and

would help provide the necessary governance and stability for policy development and implementation.

- Strong Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are also needed.
- There needed to be a clear distinction between state-led policy and national policy.
- Short briefings on the importance of appropriate food regulation should be given to those national authorities who could legally enforce the safety of foods and drugs, including the Ghana Standards Authority.

Ghana and other regional successes

An overview was presented by **Dr Francis Zotor, President of the African Nutrition Society**. Ghana had met four out of the five of the WHA's key nutrition indicators highlighted in the [2015 Global Nutrition Report](#) (Prevalence of stunting in the under fives; prevalence of wasting in under fives; prevalence of overweight in under fives; and rate of exclusive breastfeeding of infants under six months). The challenges of anaemia and iodine deficiency were nevertheless very serious in Ghana and he noted that the 2014 national annual budget was relatively insensitive to nutrition. On the question of why anaemia is declining more in men than women, it was suggested that cultural traditions where men are served food before women and children may play a role.

Stefan Kachelriess, GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) discussed the Competitive Agriculture Rice Initiative (CARI) involving 135,000 farmers in three West African countries, Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Ghana. CARI emphasises the economic development of women and addresses higher productivity/ profitability, diversification, skills development and improved small scale harvesting, post-harvest handling and crop storage. Farmers were given training on good agricultural practices (GAP) including:

- diversification and better field management
- improved processing/par-boiling on an industrial scale
- family nutrition training for men and women
- learning and defining the best methods
- provision of training materials to the farmers

The following discussion points were made:

- Many agricultural projects and initiatives should give more focus to nutrition. Instead, they were centred primarily on yields and profit margins which while very important, were only part of the route to better nutrition. The workshop participants challenged stakeholders to “build in nutrition” into these programmes.

- Vitamin A enriched maize and sweet potato varieties should be embedded much more extensively in national agricultural systems. More is being done, especially in Nigeria but there is very broad scope to scale up across West Africa.
- Improvements in policy, practice, and consumer education were required in agriculture and nutrition, and capacity building in education needed to be better resourced.
- Stakeholders should consider the political and financial incentives for upscaling successful agricultural initiatives which were nutrition-sensitive.

Breakout session 1 (facilitated by *Dr Jemima Nunoo, GIMPA*)

The group discussed the barriers identified in the [Global Panel's Accra High-Level Roundtable](#) which hindered progress in advancing effective innovative evidence-based policy and practice for nutrition in the context of food and agriculture systems. They included lack of political will, knowledge gaps, lack of appropriate regulation or enforcement, weak infrastructure, inadequate resources, and insufficient engagement by the private sector. Each of three breakout groups discussed the barriers in more detail and made the following points:

Political will

- Over-politicisation of the nutrition agenda is a significant problem as new governments often change policies before they may have had time to achieve impact. Stability in policy is critical.
- Awareness of rising levels of obesity is present but there is limited or no political will to control it.
- Rights to food and nutrition security need to be enshrined by law.
- There was a lack of nutrition champions in Nigeria and Ghana - school feeding programmes could provide good opportunities.
- Strong national CSOs are lacking in Nigeria and Ghana. Governments needed to be more receptive to CSO views.

The private sector

- There were many different and non-harmonised policies and programmes relating to the food and nutrition security challenge in West Africa.
- The private sector was not adequately involved, or not at all.
- The dialogue between the public and private sector was generally not effective.
- There was a need for better standards and regulatory controls for the private sector.

Regulation

- National and international standards should be publicised and enforced.
- Imported foods are often not labelled.

Knowledge gaps

- There is a major funding problem for nutrition research and nutrition-related policy programmes.

Economic, social and cultural barriers

- The use of complementary/supplementary feeding/foods was available, but costly.
- Obesity was rising - probably due largely to consumption of fast foods and sugary beverages.
- Urbanisation is increasingly part of the malnutrition problem but could also be part of the solution.
- There is a general need to improve hygiene and sanitation to avoid food contamination.
- Adolescents face enormous pressure from peers and there was a need for more focused sensitisation and awareness raising of nutrition issues. The use of school feeding programmes could also be an opportunity to better educate this age group.

Forward look

Professor Jeff Waage gave a 20-year horizon presentation which highlighted:

- Demographic changes - including population growth over the next 20 years, dietary transitions, with rates of overweight and obesity possibly overtaking under-nutrition in 20 years.
- Education - especially for women will drive many changes. School enrolment in girls is expected to increase dramatically.
- Climate change will be a major challenge.

Breakout session 2 (facilitated by *Dr Jemima Nunoo*, GIMPA)

Participants considered the question: *‘What are the key enabling actions in the future to overcome the barriers for delivering improved nutrition outcomes?’* in terms of:

- Current initiatives - the scope for development and integration;
- Delivering multi-sectoral solutions - creation of novel partnerships;

- Financial incentives.

A summary of ideas from the three groups is provided below:

- SUN, as a current on-going initiative, should increasingly be used as a champion.
- Academics, as civil actors, should promote information/knowledge sharing in nutrition (for example: [GNuTA](#) in Ghana).
- Ghana's national nutrition policy which has been under discussion for three years should be adopted.
- A common problem for all to focus on in Ghana and Nigeria is anaemia in women and children - an agenda for a multi-sector focus on the issue should be developed.
- Differences in country policy processes should be examined and good practices adopted. For example, Nigeria's policies are agreed directly by the executive whilst those in Ghana must go through parliament (and even sometimes to broader decentralised consultation). Nigeria also has an overall policy making body which is quite different from Ghana's National Development Planning Committee (NDPC). Its Agricultural Transformation Agenda was a great success and a good example of multi-sectoral alignments.
- The Parliamentary Committee for Agriculture and Fisheries should be seen/used as an enabler to improve the Government's commitment to better nutrition.
- Ghana's [METASIP](#), the implementation plan of the FASDEP II policy, is currently under review and provides a good opportunity for the inclusion of nutrition.
- There is urgent need for valid data and more routine data collection by governments and their agencies.
- The agro-processing SME sector should be strengthened in Ghana and across West Africa.
- The impact of the displacement of nutritious crops by cash crops (e.g. peppers are displacing millet in Ghana) should be investigated.

Development of concrete actions and next steps

Mohamed Ag Bendeck, Senior Nutrition Officer, FAO emphasised that SUN is a good example of multi-sectoral collaboration to improve nutrition. Key actions should include:

- Resource allocation for nutrition programmes;
- Training of more nutritionists;
- Promotion of multi-sectoral platforms;

- Encouraging policies that promote family participation in nutrition - for example, fruits and vegetables are three times more expensive in Ghana than in South Africa;
- Investment in capacity development for policy implementation.

The following points were made in the discussion:

- Ghana should have a strong voice in promoting better nutrition in the region of West Africa. There is an opportunity for Ghana to set a standard in policy and national leadership.
- Country-level support for giving nutrition higher priority should be galvanised through regional and national nutrition associations.
- Better coordination between ministries of agriculture, health, gender and finance on nutrition would be key to making progress. Policies and action plans should be cross-sectoral and fully costed.
- Good nutrition policies must be comprehensive and concise, attract support from the majority of stakeholders and be able to secure funding.
- Tackling a specific nutrition issue such as anaemia through a high profile national campaign supported by a multi-sectoral national platform could be an effective way to achieve impact.
- Academic nutritionists should work with government to explain how planners can work with and draw on the evidence base.
- Nutrition policy should incorporate personal responsibility.
- Policy-makers should be media savvy and ready to exploit opportunities for communication of good practice in nutrition.

Concluding Remarks

Professor Sandy Thomas summarised the day's proceedings and expressed thanks to all, including the CEO of the JAK Foundation and the Ghanaian institutional representatives.